

Shia insurgency sets stage for expanded US military intervention in Yemen

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A rocket attack by Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) near the US embassy in Sanaa, Yemen over the weekend wounded at least two Yemeni security forces amidst an ongoing occupation of the capital city by Houthi Shia rebel fighters.

The attack was reportedly launched in retaliation for a new round of US drone strikes on Friday in Al Jawf province, which reportedly killed two AQAP members and injured three young boys.

The Houthi forces initiated their assault on Sanaa on September 19, subsequently entering the city and seizing key government buildings on September 21. The fighting had left at least 340 dead by September 22, according to the Lebanese *Daily Star*. AQAP, a Sunni group, declared an open war against the Houthi rebels last week.

Yemeni President Abd Rabbuh Mansour Hadi was forced to sign a UN-brokered power-sharing agreement after the Houthi militia entrenched themselves in the city. Under the terms of the agreement reached late last week, Houthi Shia rebel groups will gain top posts inside the government.

Despite signing the UN agreement, President Hadi claims that the Houthi takeover was a “conspiracy” with “external and internal” backers, and warned that the country is plunging toward all-out civil war.

Under the UN deal, negotiated between the Houthi and Yemen’s Muslim Brotherhood-linked Islah Party, the Houthi militias are required to withdraw from Sanaa. The possible involvement of former Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh, a main political rival of the Islah Party, in facilitating the Houthi takeover has become a topic of speculation in recent reports.

According to analysts cited by the BBC, the Shia uprising significantly degraded the strength of the Islah Party during several months of heavy fighting, enabling

the Houthi fighters to capture Sanaa after a four-day siege.

Houthi gunmen raided the homes of top regime officials including National Security Chief Ali al-Ahmadi this week, and Houthi forces have established checkpoints throughout the city.

Region-wide efforts by US imperialism to stoke up and manipulate sectarian divisions have fueled the growth of conflict between Yemen’s government and armed opposition groups over at least a decade. Yemen is approximately 35 percent Shia and 65 percent Sunni.

Yemen’s Shia insurgency began in 2004, and has become thoroughly entangled with the broader regional and geopolitical power struggles. The US and its Gulf allies, Saudi Arabia in particular, have backed the government against the Shia rebels, who Saudi Arabia has said have strategic support from Iran and Hezbollah.

Positioned alongside the shipping lanes that pass through the Gulf of Aden, Yemen has critical strategic significance, making it a prime target for the machinations of US imperialism.

The US spent at least \$147 million to develop Yemen’s military and “counterterrorism” forces between 2012-2014. US bases in Djibouti and Saudi Arabia, operated by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC), launched at least 54 drone strikes against Yemen in 2012 alone.

A string of US drone attacks coordinated with Yemen’s government in July-August 2013 killed at least 34. Visiting the US around the time of the strikes, President Hadi was praised by US President Barack Obama for his “good work” in suppressing militant groups opposed to the US-backed regime.

US JSOC is in the advanced stages of planning for

extensive operations by US Special Forces inside Yemen, as revealed by an August 2013 front-page article published in the *New York Times*.

US regional allies have played an escalating role in the conflict in recent years, with sizable contingents of Saudi, Jordanian, Moroccan and Pakistani Special Forces fighting battles against opposition militias on behalf of the government.

Yemeni media claim that Iranian and Hezbollah personnel have been training Houthi fighters at camps inside of Eritrea. According to the Arab paper *Al Arabiya*, top officials from Iran's elite Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah met with Houthi leadership in 2009 to plan military operations targeting Saudi and Yemeni government forces.

Bellicose rhetoric emanating from top Western officials highlights the likelihood of stepped-up military involvement by the imperialist powers in Yemen in the immediate future. With attention focused on the Obama administration's new war in Iraq and Syria, it appears likely that the US and its allies are preparing yet another military intervention in a different Middle Eastern subregion, again using the pretext of a war against radical Islamic terrorism.

British Foreign Secretary Philip Hammond denounced the Houthi offensive against Sanaa this week, saying that it was "unacceptable." He said, "Not only does the recent violence damage Yemen's political transition process, it could fuel new tensions and strengthen the hand of Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula – threatening the security of all of us."

In an official statement responding to the embassy attack, the US State Department warned, "The United States is stepping up efforts to work with the international community to pursue sanctions against individuals who are threatening Yemen's peace, stability and security."

Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, the White House chief counterterrorism advisor, Lisa Monaco, similarly declared her "strong condemnation of members of the Houthi movement and other parties who have resorted to violence."

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal echoed these comments in a speech to the UN this week, saying, "Yemen faces accelerating and extremely dangerous conditions that require us all to look and propose the necessary solutions to confront these

unprecedented challenges."

Previous statements from top US officials indicate the government's determination to utilize the activity of AQAP as a pretext to step up its military intervention in Yemen. During a press conference last year, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said that "AQAP in particular is viewed by the national security team as the most operational of the Al Qaeda affiliates and the one that poses the greatest potential threat to the United States."



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